

Congressman Jesse Jackson, Jr., today said, "By including next-of-kin information in electronic health records, the House of Representatives took a small but significant step toward helping those who cannot help themselves during the critical hours immediately following a medical emergency." The next-of-kin information was added when the House passed Congressman Jackson's amendment to H.R. 4157, The Health Information Technology Promotion Act.

Jackson said, "Nationwide, nearly a million people arrive in emergency rooms each year unconscious or physically unable to give informed consent for their care. Elaine Sullivan was one of them. A very active 71-year-old woman, Elaine fell at home while getting into her bathtub. When paramedics arrived, they realized that injuries to her mouth and head had made her unable to communicate or give informed consent for her care.

"Elaine Sullivan was stable for the first few days, but she began to slip into critical condition. The hospital failed to notify her family for six days. Tragically, Elaine Sullivan died alone in the hospital. In the aftermath of this tragedy, Elaine Sullivan's daughter, Jan, and granddaughter, Laura, turned their personal pain into public action. Jan and Laura Greenwald went to work to make sure that what happened to their loved one would not happen to others. In Elaine Sullivan's memory and honor, I introduced H.R. 2560 so that in the future, phone calls to loved ones will always be made. My amendment today included a provision of H.R. 2560.

"Most hospitals notify the next-of-kin of unconscious emergency room arrivals relatively quickly. However, emergency rooms are extremely high pressure, and sometimes, chaotic environments. In the hustle and bustle of the ER, despite the professionalism and dedication of staff, there are real risks that a simple phone call may not be able to be made in a timely fashion.

"A Step Toward Helping Those Who Cannot Help Themselves"

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"Today's bill seeks to better utilize technology to improve the gathering and communication of vital data used by health care providers and other interested parties. Any such effort would fall woefully short if it does not include next-of-kin information," Jackson concluded.